

***Professional Pedagogy for Passionate Practitioners* A
Year's Curriculum for Avocational Teachers in the
Supplementary Religious School**

An Education Capstone Project

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Introduction

This curriculum is designed to provide professional development for avocational teachers in the synagogue supplementary school setting and is to be coordinated by the congregation's educator in ongoing consultation with faculty members. It focuses on creating a Professional Learning Community (PLC) among the teachers to maximize the strengths of the staff. The Backward Design approach advocated in *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins and McTighe is used as one of the primary tools for planning.

The faculty will meet monthly from October to May to focus on various aspects of pedagogy. This curriculum is conceived as a series of learning opportunities for these monthly meetings. The sessions are focused around creating lessons or units for teaching Passover. These sessions will also help teachers prepare what they are going to teach in the following weeks. Teachers will apply what they have learned and reflect with each other and with the principal on the results.

This unit is intended to develop sound pedagogical methods as the base for lesson and unit planning by teachers. Thus, I have used the word 'teacher' to refer here to the intended student of the unit and the word 'learner' to refer to those in the student body of the congregation. I have used the term principal to refer to the Educator or Education Director.

The curriculum is written specifically for the faculty at Congregation BethEl in Norwalk, CT. BethEl is a traditional, egalitarian Conservative congregation. The Navasky Religious School follows a standard model: students in grades Kindergarten through 7 attend on Sunday mornings. Beginning in grade 3, students also attend Tuesday afternoons. The faculty is drawn from the surrounding communities. The current faculty is equally divided between 20- somethings and those with grown children. Only two of the teachers have a formal background

in teaching and only one of those has experience in the classroom beyond the supplementary Religious School setting.

Rationale

How do we make and keep good teachers? That is, indeed, the question. When I was a fourth year rabbinic student, a rabbi asked me for a reference for a college student he was thinking of hiring to teach in his religious school. In the course of our conversation, he made a comment I carry with me thirty years later, "It's easier to take a teacher and teach them enough Jewish content to keep them a week ahead of their students than it is to take someone who knows the Jewish content and teach them to teach."

The issues of hiring well-trained teachers have challenged Jewish supplementary school principals from the time of Rebecca Gratz (Ashton 35). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Samson Benderly found it necessary to invest substantial resources in the training of teachers (Krasner 55-58). While professional development is a necessity for all educators throughout their careers, the need for ongoing development and learning is even more pressing now because of the urgent call for change in Jewish education today in every setting. Teachers must be part of the changing picture of Jewish education, and the professional development of teachers will need to move in new directions. New methods of teaching can encourage students to take Jewish learning into the many aspects of their lives.

Providing new kinds of professional development for teachers is challenging. In their article, "Professional Development for Teachers: Why Doesn't the Model Change," Gail Dorph and Barry Holtz state the issue simply, "the weakness of teachers' backgrounds and general lack of preparation for the field are well known phenomena" (67). Most teaching staffs in liberal synagogues today naturally divide into two groups. Some teachers might have been trained in

pedagogy with attendant classroom experience, while others might have a rich Jewish background. Sometimes a third group is also represented – those who bring enthusiasm and commitment but little background in either teaching or Jewish content. In JESNA's 2008 report, *Educators in Jewish Schools Study (EJSS)*, "complementary school administrators indicated that they resorted to suboptimal strategies to address at least some of their teaching vacancies."It is rare that a job search yields a new hire teacher with the gifts of both Jewish knowledge and classroom expertise. Even when such a gem is found, there is a need to orient the faculty member to the new setting. Ideally, every teacher in a supplementary school setting would feel secure in both the areas of pedagogy and content. As the aforementioned rabbi asserted many years ago, it is easier to hire the trained teachers.

Teachers pick up Jewish content in the ways adults today collect knowledge in any area of interest. However, in moments of uncertainty, only a trained teacher would be familiar with necessary resources. Many sources are available to fill in any gaps of Jewish knowledge. The principal can direct a teacher to books, articles, websites, teacher guides, and lectures.. If the synagogue has a denominational affiliation or particular focus, the principal will address these perspectives with faculty members as needed. For many teachers, the larger concern is the pedagogical aspect of their work.

Historically, the retention of teachers in the supplementary school setting has been problematic (JESNA 2008-09). Lack of success in the classroom discourages a new teacher from seeing teaching as a long-term pursuit. Increasing teachers' feelings of competence and confidence leads to increased retention.

In her article, "Toward the Professionalization of Jewish Teachers," Isa Aron (1990) points out that teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards, including their perceived ability to

"reach students" (7). This, in turn, leads to a teacher's sense of satisfaction and, thus, willingness or eagerness to continue teaching (7). In a recent article "What Do Teachers Want? Strategies for Keeping Your Best Teachers Happy and Growing," Peter Gow (6ff) identifies five areas for consideration: salary, school culture, professional development, new teacher orientation and ongoing evaluation. He identifies professional learning as one of the most important areas to keep teachers happy and growing.

In the best of all possible worlds, there would be a trajectory in Jewish supplementary school teaching parallel to that in general education. Our teachers would study both education and Jewish Studies. Then they would undertake student teaching with a master or mentor teacher who would observe them and provide guidance. Finally, a new teacher would be given a class of his/her own with active supervision. The reality, however, is far different. Without the option of pre-service education to guarantee a foundation in teaching, principals hire teachers who must be trained as part of their initial classroom experience. In addition, the design of learning today is radically different from the past. Therefore, the teacher may have little frame of reference for what is being asked of him/her.

Professional development for teachers is not a novel concept. Even the question of how to do this in the supplementary school setting has been addressed elsewhere. In many communities the effort has been provided by central agencies. However, in *Inservice Education: A Priority for All Seasons*, Sara S. Lee (1984) states that the "investment in centralized workshops, institutes, and conferences appears to be of limited value" (22). Additionally, she points out "...the most effective inservice paradigms are those which relate to the unique characteristics of individual schools and their staffs" (21). She further states that "[p]rincipals must be prepared by training and by setting of priorities to act as instructional leaders." Aron

calls on the senior educator to either train teachers or to provide for that training (2004).

However, the literature fails to address what these teachers need to know and how it can be communicated effectively.

What is the goal of such professional learning? One aim is teacher retention. The *EJSS* study reports that retention depends on improving teacher effectiveness, recognition and validation of teachers, and a nurturing school environment that encourages self-reflection (39). Gow develops these ideas, saying that retention in the teaching field depends on "high satisfaction among teachers who feel that their work is in tune with a school's values and expectations and whose working conditions and school communities give the teachers an overall sense of success" (7). Elsewhere, he asserts that teachers, like all who work, "wish to be taken seriously, to be good at their work and inspired and supported to become even better, and to find through their jobs both warm personal relationships and professional recognition" (6). Clearly, retention and job satisfaction are deeply connected.

If, however, we want to change the models of what actually happens in Jewish education, only serious professional development efforts can bring the teachers to a new understanding of aims and methods. As Lee points out, "all evidence points to the conclusion that the knowledge, skill, and commitment of staff are the critical variables in the success or failure of any educational innovation" (21). With a sense of what needs to be accomplished, the question becomes how it can be done.

Writing in the *Journal of Jewish Educational Leadership*, Clifton and Kasloff promote the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), reflecting the current practice in public education. They describe the PLC as "a group of educators who work collaboratively" (4) and act as researchers and resources for one another. Alongside this collaboration is a practice of

self-reflection. They contrast the PLC with the one-off workshops that are common but characterized too often by a lack of follow up. Instead, they encourage regular checking in with each other and creating mechanisms for working to get better at their craft. The PLC offers the teacher support and sharing which result in less isolation and increased morale. In keeping with the best of Jewish tradition, the PLC transforms the teachers into learners (5). This enables teachers to reach new levels of understanding.

Aron calls for this kind of on-going professional development; "The development of commitment - to the tradition, the community, and to the students - should be one of the goals of all training programs" (32). She assumes that teachers are hired in part due to their initial commitment but insists that commitment must be deepened through further development. The teacher's connection to Jewish tradition is what distinguishes the religious school PLC from that of the public school.

It turns out that the learning of Judaism on one hand and of pedagogy on the other does not bring about the needed changes. Dorph and Holtz write that recent research in general education "strongly emphasizes the importance of connecting subject matter to practice" (69). Practices of the PLC must focus on collaboration and reflection in the teaching of Jewish content in particular. Deepening of familiarity and knowledge of both content and pedagogy brings commitment and caring.

Another benefit of the PLC lies in the facilitation of teachers learning more about each other. This, in turn, fosters a caring attitude among teachers and toward the institution. Sharing both their commonalities and their differences with each other then enables teachers to care for students in all their diversity.

A variety of methods are available to the PLC. According to Lee any inservice needs to include "presentation of theory or description of strategy; modeling or demonstration; practice; feedback; and coaching for application" (21). Clifton and Kasloff advocate the use of whole faculty study groups, lesson study, tuning protocols, action research and classroom or school visitation (6). Using several of these creates a model for differentiated instruction throughout the school.

In reality, serious obstacles face the principal who wants to improve instruction in the supplementary religious school. Dorph and Holtz identify three challenges facing such a leader: a lack of support by the community due to inertia or unwillingness to invest in part-time short-term employees; the length of time needed to see results from the effort; and a lack of available time (71-2). These are not addressed herein. Dorph and Holtz are also concerned with the ability of the principal, whom they identify as 'undertrained' both in general and specifically in the area of training teachers. Even more challenging is their observation that principals need "a deeper commitment ...to *how much* professional development their teachers need to have, as well as a greater understanding of *what kinds* of professional development are most effective" (71).

In creating a PLC comprised of the faculty members, the quality of overall instruction will improve as they learn to do the following:

- Focus on agreed-upon goals
- Teach toward essential understandings, both topical and general
- Continuously ask essential questions
- Regularly assess for understanding
- Plan learning activities that effectively connect to goals

While a single article or curriculum cannot, by itself, train principals for the tasks of professional development, what follows is an outline of theory and practice that, if put into action by the principal, can increase the teacher's comfort, competence and satisfaction in the classroom resulting in an improved learning experience for students.

To the Principal:

I wrote this curriculum for use in the Navasky Religious School at Congregation Beth El in Norwalk, CT. It is my hope that it can be used by many of my colleagues in varied Religious School settings. It is aimed especially at smaller schools with untrained teachers on the faculty.

The goals of the curriculum include: creating a Professional Learning Community among the faculty; building teachers' skills in lesson and unit planning based on Backward Design; and strengthening teachers' Jewish backgrounds and commitment to the tradition. All of this is done in a setting that encourages support and building personal relationships among all involved and with the intent to increase teacher satisfaction as a result of an improved sense of competence. In turn, this can benefit the school by resulting in the long-term goals of more effective student learning and increased teacher retention.

It is important, in the end, that each educator be enabled to tailor this professional development effort to the needs of her individual school. In the next section I have outlined below some of the background and framework needed to be able to present this curriculum. In addition, as you prepare, refer to the Bibliography at the conclusion in order to customize these materials to your own situation.

May we be blessed through our sacred work to raise up a new generation of serious, committed Jews.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Liz Rolle

Background and Framework for the Principal

This curriculum is intended to involve teachers in some of the same models of learning that are most effective in the classroom with younger learners as well. In part, it is based in a constructivist belief that learners will indicate what they need to learn if given the opportunity. The teachers should have the opportunity to help shape the curriculum. For this reason, only a few lessons are mapped out in their entirety. The other proposed topics may be shelved or postponed in deference to needs expressed by faculty members.

In the spirit of addressing the real needs of learners, the curriculum aims to facilitate teacher planning for Passover learning in their own classrooms. The topic of each session is applied to preparing lessons or a unit for Passover. As written, Passover can be a culminating moment if monthly meetings begin in October. If the situation warrants or the timing is different, the subject of the lessons being prepared by the teachers can easily be changed.

In the public school arena, Professional Learning Communities have become an important model of teacher development that builds teacher satisfaction through mutual support and the building of personal relationships among a faculty. Research and data suggest that PLCs have become the most effective form of professional development for teachers. There are few models in the supplementary Religious School setting reflecting this contemporary approach to teacher learning. I hope this curriculum begins to fill the gap. The items listed in the Annotated Bibliography at the end of this work are helpful in learning about Professional Learning Communities.

Pedagogical underpinnings include Backward Design based on *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. A 'primer' on Backward Design is included at the

end of this work Basically, Backward Design encourages the teacher to plan from the goals down to the learning activities instead of the method used by many teachers who plan from the learning activities back to the goals.

It is important to encourage teachers to help students move toward critical thinking in Religious School, just as they are learning to do elsewhere in their lives. Bloom's taxonomy is one way to structure material to challenge students in this manner. Therefore, *Bloom's* taxonomy of levels of intellectual behavior is used as a base for the session on diverse learning. A wealth of information about *Bloom's* taxonomy is available on the internet. This site is particularly clear:

http://ww2.odu.edu/educ/roverbau/Bloom/blooms_taxonomy.htm. The following link is

for an article on the use of the taxonomy in differentiated learning:

[http://www.lessonplanet.com/article/gifted-and-talented-education/watching-minds-](http://www.lessonplanet.com/article/gifted-and-talented-education/watching-minds-bloom)

[bloom](http://www.lessonplanet.com/article/gifted-and-talented-education/watching-minds-bloom). (Links as of April 2013.)

Learner outcomes cited in this curriculum are based on a model originated by the LOMED efforts of the Jewish Education Project of New York. Assessments are based on changes observed in learners in four areas. Identifiable results are classified as Knowing, Doing/Acting, Believing/Valuing and Belonging.¹

The curriculum also depends on active reflection. Dewey teaches that no learning is truly integrated without reflection (87). While that may occur naturally, in this curriculum it is intentionally built into the process. Teachers are asked to reflect not only on their own learning, but also on the very teaching in which they are participating. Two kinds of

¹ To learn more, visit <http://lomed.wikispaces.com>.

structured reflection are outlined at the end of this work in the sections titled 'Friendly Feedback' and 'Debriefing the Lesson.'

Each session includes a small selection of traditional text to study. It is anticipated that in the early sessions, this text study will be conducted with the entire group. As comfort increases, teachers may be called upon to lead the text study and, gradually, hevruta style learning may be introduced and adopted. At the end of this work brief instructions on how to create and structure a text study are provided. In addition, the article by Gail Dorph "What Do Teachers Need to Know to Teach Torah?" offers thoughts about necessary background for Torah study.

Outcomes

Congregation BethEl of Norwalk, Connecticut, is a 250-household congregation. A member of the United Synagogue, the congregation describes itself as traditional and egalitarian. It prides itself on a sense of community that revolves primarily around the Shabbat morning service experience. Like the majority of supplementary Religious Schools around the country, the student body is small, averaging around 70 students from 40 families in any given year. There is one class for each grade from Kindergarten through Grade 7. The school faculty includes a single teacher for each grade, a music specialist and a remedial Hebrew tutor. There is an Education Director. The rabbi of the congregation is involved with the school on an ongoing basis.

Vision of the Learning Program

Congregation Beth El of Norwalk, Connecticut

At BethEl, we seek to inspire in each of our learners a thirst for Jewish living and learning. We aim to instill in our learners a sense of belonging to our community and to Am Yisrael, the Jewish people, as well as a commitment to Judaism that will play a central role in their lives.

Vision of the Navasky Religious School

In keeping with the vision and mission of the congregation as a whole, we seek to develop in our learners a strong, positive sense of Jewish identity that connects them with Am Yisrael, the Jewish people, by endowing them with skills and knowledge to participate in the life of the Jewish Community at home, in the synagogue and in the larger Jewish world.

Mission of the Navasky Religious School

The mission of the Navasky Religious School at Congregation BethEl is to help create the next generation of committed, knowledgeable Conservative Jews. A strong, positive Jewish identity provides learners the opportunity to make meaning in their lives in the world. Comfort with Jewish skills, rituals, and observances helps provide a sense of rootedness in the Jewish community. Participation in the life of the Jewish family and Jewish community provides a sense of belonging.

Enduring Understandings

The eight sessions of professional learning for teachers are built around these enduring understandings:

- Successful pedagogy turns authentic passion for Jewish life into effective education in the hands of a confident educator.
- Effective education includes many levels of understanding, in the end allowing learners to transfer the learning beyond the classroom setting.

Teachers will engage with these enduring understandings as they explore eight areas of pedagogical practice, each guided by a Core Concept.

Essential Questions

Throughout their teaching experiences, these questions underlie the thinking of teachers:

- What do learners need to know to live Jewish lives?
- What kind of learning experiences will inspire my students to be on a Jewish journey throughout their lives?
- What knowledge, skills and/or concepts will last a lifetime?

Goals

These goals guide teachers in designing effective instructional experiences:

- Teachers connect classroom learning to the lives of their students both in and out of the classroom.
- Learners will benefit as their teachers learn to guide them in cognitively more challenging and spiritually more meaningful learning that can impact the way they live.

Learner Outcomes**Doing/Acting**

Teachers will use available tools and resources to build engaging learning experiences. They will seek feedback from and offer feedback to colleagues in their efforts to create effective instructional design.

Knowing

Teachers will know the many elements required for shaping effective Jewish learning experiences for their students. They will be familiar with techniques for supporting each other in this undertaking.

Believing!Valuing

Teachers will respect all members of the school community for their strengths. They will appreciate the input they receive from those who seek to support their work.

Belonging

Teachers will come to know and value each member of the faculty. They will support one another in their work. Each teacher will feel valued for their contributions to the school community.

PROFESSIONAL PEDAGOGY FOR PASSIONATE PRACTITIONERS

8 Sessions to Improved Instructional Design

This is a suggested outline for the year of monthly sessions. The sequence is not fixed and can be rearranged as needed. Immediate needs of teachers or the requirements of the calendar will dictate the actual sequence of presentation.

Modeling Clay

Topic: Learning to Teach

Essential Questions: What skills do I feel secure in? What skills would strengthen my teaching?

Core Concept: As teachers, we can grow and our teaching skills can improve if we work at it, enabling us to shape our students' Jewish lives more effectively.

Objective: Teachers will reflect on their own and each others' past development, identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Learning for a Lifetime

Topic: Enduring Understandings

Essential Questions: How does my teaching provide a foundation for students' Jewish lives?

Where do I get my concept of Jewish teaching? Who are my role models for Jewish teaching?

Core Concept: Enduring Understandings point to the lifelong bigger picture beyond the current lesson and context.

Objective: Teachers will recognize and write Enduring Understandings that are usable with their learners as they learn about Passover.

Making Learning Bloom

Topic: 6 Levels of Learning; 6 Kinds of Questions

Essential Questions: What kinds of questions make students think? What kinds of questions help create meaningful discussions? How do questions make the learning significant?

Core Concept: The same material can be taught on many different levels, depending on the capacity of the learner.

Objective: Teachers will learn to identify and create objectives at all six levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

What's the Big Idea?

Topic: Core Concepts

Essential Questions: How do I choose the single idea for focusing my lesson?

Core Concept: Less is *more*. *Tafastam'rubah lo tafasta* 110 11 '7:1:111(j110 11. A lesson need only have a single new piece of teaching. Keeping the core concept in mind helps keep the lesson focused.

Objective: Teachers will learn a process for identifying core concepts and choose one concept for a unit they are planning.

Who Am I, Anyway?

Topic: Essential Questions

Essential Questions: What questions do serious thinking Jews ask themselves throughout life?

Core Concept: Essential Questions are large, deep questions that naturally recur throughout our lives and cause us to rethink prior experiences and assumptions. They point to Big Ideas and have no right or final answer.

Smaller Essential Questions can point to the Big Ideas of the lesson or unit.

Objective: Teachers will identify and create Essential Questions FOR A UNIT.

Ready, Set, Trigger!

Topic: Set Inductions and Trigger Activities

Essential Questions: How can I relate the learning to the lives of my learners in order to draw them into the learning for the day? How does the learning impact their everyday lives?

Core Concept: Engaging learners is dependent on first connecting the learning to their lives.

Objective: Teachers will discover and choose interesting hooks for introducing a lesson.

Acting Out

Topic: Learning activities

Essential Questions: What activities will appeal to different learners and allow them to learn in their own ways?

Core Concept: Varied learning activities help to keep learners interested and appeal to the diversity of intelligences in the group.

Objective: Teachers will create several different learning activities for the same Core Concept based on the approach suggested by multiple intelligences or differentiated learning.

Good Grades- 4 A's

Topic: Anchor, Add, Apply, Away

Essential Questions: How do the learners integrate the new learning so that it is an ongoing part of their lives?

Core Concept: Learners integrate new content when they apply it to their own learning.

Objective: Teachers will construct a lesson plan following the Norris guide of the 4 A's.

Lesson: Modeling Clay

Topic: Learning to Teach

Length of lesson: 90 minutes

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Core Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many sources continue to inform my decisions in instructional design. Each person's path to teaching is unique. Improving instruction is an ongoing effort. Colleagues and peers can offer input and insight towards my growth as a teacher. 	
Understanding(s)/goals Teachers will recognize and value: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each teacher brings their own strengths to their teaching. By sharing their strengths with other teachers, all teachers can improve their pedagogical practice and deepen their understanding of Jewish tradition. 	Essential Question(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can I learn to continually improve my skills, abilities and knowledge as a teacher? With which tools, skills, knowledge, values do I feel confident? What do I need and need to do to further develop as a teacher?
Objectives (outcomes): Teachers will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify their own strengths as a teachers Reflect on their own and others' personal teaching histories and current strengths Identify areas they would like to strengthen Offer interpretations of text in Text Study Apply insights from Text Study to self and students regarding the unique perspectives of each learner 	
Materials: Handouts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Session I Text Study sheet with Text and questions to consider 8 Session Outline SMART Goals Worksheet Paper, pens Copy paper Play-doh (© paper or paper covering as workspace for Play-doh) Note-taking materials- pens, paper	

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s): Teachers will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create object • Share with partner • Participate in discussions about personal strengths and text study • Complete the SMART Learning Goals Worksheet 	Other Evidence: (Based in rubric of Doing, Knowing, Believing, Naluing, Belonging) K– D-raise questions D– Observable interest and participation in discussion V – express interest in input of other participants V – express insight about uniqueness of each community member B-share personal news
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	
Learning Activities: Check-In: News and Doings members want to share with the faculty group. Introduction: Principal introduces the topic, "Learning to Teach: Modeling Clay" Anchor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close your eyes and think of a time when you had a successful teaching experience –it jelled, the class was with you. Look carefully at the scene -what is happening? What did you do? Say? What approach did you use? How did you get to that moment? What makes you label it as 'successful?' • Use Play-Doh to create an object or figure that represents who you are as a teacher today when you are at your best. • Share with another your reflection on your creation -What does it say about you as a teacher today? How did you learn to be this teacher? Relate one important experience that helped you become the teacher you are today. Transition/Add: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with the group -What were you doing when you were at your best? How did you learn to be that teacher? • Make two lists on the board: 1) every 'technique' used by a teacher (what they were doing in that special moment) and 2) every different 'method' of learning to teach that is mentioned (how they became the teacher they are). • Shift focus to the 'learning methods' list. • Ask, "What are additional ways we learn to teach?" Have group add other 'methods' of learning to teach they have experienced, witnessed or are aware of. Transition/Add/Apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text Study: BT Sanh. 38a. Discuss text as a whole group, drawing attention to the uniqueness of each person's path to teaching and the uniqueness of each learner's path to learning • Acknowledge each teacher's unique path that resulted from the range of 'methods' and in the 'techniques' listed by the group. Introduce ongoing sessions of Professional Development as a path of continual improvement and growth as 	

teachers and the formation of a Professional Learning Community.

- Point to additional possible areas of exploration, including subject matter knowledge base, self-knowledge and ongoing reflection as a practitioner.
- Share the Eight Session Outline, agreeing to be flexible based on the needs of the group. Explain that these 8 sessions will be used to create a Pesach curriculum and lesson plans for the school as each topic is explored.
- Have each participant rank-order the topics they anticipate being most valuable, as well as suggesting additional areas of interest. (This step can also be done individually later or turned in to the coordinator at the end of the session.)

Away:

- Working individually, reflect on possible goals for improved teaching through the year
- Complete the SMART Goal Worksheet
- Commit to follow-up with each teacher to discuss individual goals and paths for working

Lesson Debrief:

Principal introduces the ideas of 'Friendly Feedback,' 'Debriefing the Lesson' and examining the lesson plan as a method of improving instruction; then invites teachers to look closely at the lesson they have just been a part of.

- Discussion of structure of lesson of the day
- Exploration of rationale for lesson flow
- Use Friendly Feedback Protocol

SESSION I HANDOUT TEXTSTUDY

BT Sanh38a

The creation of the first man alone was to show the greatness of the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, the Blessed. For if a person mints many coins from one mould, they are all alike; but the Holy One, the Blessed, fashioned all people in the mould of the first person, and not one resembles the other, for it is written, 'It is changed as clay under seal' (Job 38:14).

תנו רבנן להגיד גדולתו של מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד וכולן דומין זה לזה אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא טובע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד מהן דומה לחבירו שנא איוב לח-יד תתהפך כחומר חותם

1. What does the text say? What is it talking about?
2. How can it be applied to our discussion of our learning to teach?
3. Can it be applied in any way to our students?

SESSION I HANDOUT

PROFESSIONAL PEDAGOGY FOR PASSIONATE PRACTITIONERS

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Core Concept: As teachers, we can grow and our teaching skills can improve if we work at it, enabling us to shape our students' Jewish lives more effectively.

Objective: Teachers will reflect on their own and each others' past development, identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Learning Experience: Use Play-doh to create an object or figure that represents you as a teacher.

Learning for a Lifetime

Topic: Enduring Understandings

Essential Questions: How does my teaching provide a foundation for students' Jewish lives?

Where do I get my concept of Jewish teaching? Who are my role models for Jewish teaching?

Core Concept: Enduring Understandings point to the lifelong bigger picture beyond the current lesson and context.

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Making Learning Bloom

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Core Concept: The same material can be taught on many different levels, depending on the capacity of the learner.

Objective: Teachers will learn to identify and create objectives at all six levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

What's the Big Idea?

Topic: Core Concepts

Essential Questions: How do I choose the single idea for focusing my lesson?

Core Concept: Less is more. Tafastam'rubah lo tafastano :mN?7J::J.li?Jno n. A lesson need only have a single new piece of teaching. Keeping the core concept in mind helps keep the lesson focused.

Objective: Teachers will learn a process for identifying core concepts and choose one concept for a unit they are planning.

Who Am I, Anyway?

Topic: Essential Questions

Essential Questions: What questions do serious thinking Jews ask themselves throughout life?

Core Concept: Essential Questions are large, deep questions that naturally recur throughout our lives and cause us to rethink prior experiences and assumptions. They point to Big Ideas and have no right or final answer.

Smaller Essential Questions can point to the Big Ideas of the lesson or unit.

Objective: Teachers will identify and create Essential Questions FOR A UNIT.

Ready, Set, Trigger!

Topic: Set Inductions and Trigger Activities

Essential Questions: How can I relate the learning to the lives of my learners in order to draw them into the learning for the day? How does the learning impact their everyday lives?

Core Concept: Engaging learners is dependent on first connecting the learning to their lives.

Objective: Teachers will discover and choose interesting hooks for introducing a lesson.

Acting Out

Topic: Learning activities

Essential Questions: What activities will appeal to different learners and allow them to learn in their own ways?

Core Concept: Varied learning activities help to keep learners interested and appeal to the diversity of intelligences in the group.

Objective: Teachers will create several different learning activities for the same Core Concept based on the approach suggested by multiple intelligences or differentiated learning.

Good Grades- 4 A's

Topic: Anchor, Add, Apply, Away

Essential Questions: How do the learners integrate the new learning so that it is an ongoing part of their lives?

Core Concept: Learners integrate new content when they apply it to their own learning.

Objective: Teachers will construct a lesson plan following the Norris guide of the 4 A's.

SESSION I HANDOUT**SMART Learning Goals Worksheet**

Today's Date _____

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

SPECIFIC :What is it I am trying to accomplish?

MEASURABLE: In what ways can success be measured?

ACTION-ORIENTED: What results will I be able to see when my goals are accomplished?
What concrete things will I be able to do as a direct result of accomplishing these learning goals?

REALISTIC: Are the goals achievable? Are there additional resources that need to be available in order to achieve the goal?

TIMELY: What is the timeframe for accomplishing the learning goals?

GOAL

FEEDBACK ON MY GOAL

Lesson: Learning for a Lifetime

Topic: Enduring Understandings

Length of lesson: 90 minutes

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
<p>Core Concept The Enduring Understanding gives learners a tool for living that lasts a lifetime and that can be transferred to other areas of their lives as well. The Enduring Understanding provides the teacher with the conceptual foundation that connects discrete facts, skills and other elements of curriculum.</p>	
<p>Understanding (s)/goals: Teachers will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Enduring Understanding expresses a lifelong idea beyond the current lesson and content. • An Enduring Understanding underlies every unit or lesson, connecting it to something larger. • An Enduring Understanding serves as the foundational roadmap shared by teacher and learner to ensure that a lesson gets where it intends to go. 	<p>Essential Question(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the best way for me to plan a lesson to be most effective for my learners? • How does my teaching provide a foundation for students' Jewish lives?
<p>Objectives (outcomes): Teachers will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish among Enduring Understandings, Core Concepts and Learning Activities • Create a lesson plan including an Enduring Understanding, a Core Concept and Learning Activities • Reflect on the process of lesson planning and identify which steps are easier or more challenging on a personal level 	
<p>Materials: Handouts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session II Text Study sheet with Text and questions to consider • School's Mission Statement • Defining Enduring Understandings • Session II Resource Sheet • Understanding by Design Lesson Plan Form • Reflection on Session II questions <p>Paper, pens Pads of sticky notes (one for each participant) Easel with poster paper Markers</p>	

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
<p>Performance Task(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in Text Study Discussion Reflect on their own process for lesson planning and share with the group Plan a lesson based on an Enduring Understanding and Core Concept Reflect on the difference in this approach to planning compared with their usual approach 	<p>Other Evidence:</p> <p>(Based in rubric of Doing, Knowing, Believing, Naluing, Belonging)</p> <p><u>K</u> - Identify distinctions among Enduring Understanding, Core Concept, Learning Activity</p> <p>D - Help teammates and others</p> <p><u>V</u> - Verbalize value of in-depth process of planning based in Big Ideas and Enduring Understandings</p> <p><u>V&B</u> – Express an appreciation for teamwork</p> <p>B - Share news with the group</p>
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	
<p>Learning Activities:</p> <p>Check-In: News and Doings members want to share with the faculty group.</p> <p>Introduction: Principal introduces today's topic: "Enduring Understandings: Learning for a Lifetime."</p> <p>Anchor:</p> <p>Ask teachers to share their planning process for a lesson. What about planning lessons comes easily? What seems difficult? In the actual presentation, how are their plans working out? What is their satisfaction level with their plans? How often do they find that their goals are met?</p> <p>Text Study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> George Harrison and Alice in Wonderland quotes. Last time, we worked as a whole group. This time, divide into two or three groups; work together; then come back to share findings. Build on their ideas to point to the need to know where we intend to go before we start down the road of a lesson or lesson planning. <p>Add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is an Enduring Understanding? Why do we need these in our school? In our lesson planning? How do these serve as answers to the Texts we have studied? Educator introduces the work by identifying the need for a more comprehensive overview of Passover for the school curriculum as a whole, along with a proposal that the staff work on this together. Then, introduce the method of think-pair-share to be used in this effort. Teachers will have a chance to think about a question that has been posed and jot down answers; then they will share their ideas with another teacher sitting nearby; finally, the pair will share their ideas with the larger group. Ask teachers to list for themselves the many things they would like students to learn in preparation for Pesach. Do this by writing each item on a separate sticky note. Together, all of their lists will create a comprehensive picture for the entire school. Remind them that this first effort is individual, just their own ideas. Give teachers 	

time to write their own list.

- Have teachers turn to a neighbor* to compare lists, creating a more comprehensive outline. After a few minutes, each pair then shares one or two items from their list with the group.
- Educator proposes that it will be important to know which items to emphasize as their classes begin their Passover study. Introduce the three categories:
 - o Big Ideas or Core Tasks
 - o Important to know and do, and
 - o Worth being familiar with
- Suggest that these categories can only be decided effectively in light of our mission. Refer to the Handout with the school's mission.
- Ask teachers to join in groups of four this time and arrange sticky notes into the three categories as they see it and in light of the school's mission.
- Again, have teachers share their ideas with the larger group. This time, teachers can bring their sticky notes up to the board and assign them to one of the three categories. Principal then reviews proposed items in each category and group indicates consensus about where each one belongs. (Come back to these later.)
- Refer to Handout with definitions of Enduring Understanding (EU) and Core Concept (CC). Read aloud. Invite clarifying questions.
- Have teachers pair up to complete the exercise 'Match the EU to the CC' and discuss.
- Distribute the Session II Resource Sheet. Examine carefully the difference between EUs and CCs for the Passover curriculum. Compare to the Big Ideas the group has collected. Translate these Big Ideas into Enduring Understandings and Core Concepts. Teachers add new items from earlier discussion to these initial ideas for Enduring Understandings and Core Concepts.

Apply:

- Working in pairs and using the Understanding by Design Lesson Plan Form, teachers plan Learning Activities based on one of the Enduring Understandings. Choosing a Core Concept, they will plan a lesson for one of their classes; if time allows, for both classes. Principal circulates, asking questions and providing guidance.

Away:

- Teachers will post their lesson plans up to this point to a Google doc.
- They will then go to each of the Google docs and post comments, questions and suggestions for their colleagues.
- Discussion (online) or note-taking on what remains to be done on the plan.

Lesson Debrief:

Principal reviews tools for 'Friendly Feedback' and 'Debriefing the Lesson' and examining the lesson plan as a method of improving instruction.

- Use Debriefing the Lesson Protocol
- Use Friendly Feedback Protocol

Debrief/Away:

- Teachers write reflection on the lesson planning process so far using handout 'Reflection on Session II' to guide their thinking.

**Teachers may be assigned a partner in each instance or choose their own. The principal might prefer to have particular pairings to address other staffing issues, such as having*

primary grade teachers get to know each other or wanting newer teachers to get to know veterans. Use this opportunity to help build community as needed.

SESSION II HANDOUT

TEXT STUDY

George Harrison or Alice in Wonderland

Text A

And if you don't know where you're going
Any road will take you there – George Harrison

Text B

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where--" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
"--so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."
--Alice and the Cheshire Cat from Alice in Wonderland

1. Examine each text. What does it say?
2. What are they talking about? What do the two texts have in common?
3. Where in our lives can we apply these ideas?
4. How do they relate to teaching?

SESSION II HANDOUT
MISSION OF THE NAVASKY RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

The mission of the Navasky Religious School at Congregation BethEl is to help create the next generation of committed, knowledgeable Conservative Jews. A strong, positive Jewish identity provides learners the opportunity to make meaning in their lives in the world. Comfort with Jewish skills, rituals, and observances helps provide a sense of rootedness in the Jewish community. Participation in the life of the Jewish family and Jewish community provides a sense of belonging.

SESSION II HANDOUT

Defining Enduring Understandings

Enduring understandings are statements summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom. They synthesize what students should understand-not just know or do-as a result of studying a particular content area. Moreover, they articulate what students should "revisit" over the course of their lifetimes in relationship to the content area.

Enduring understandings:

- frame the big ideas that give meaning and lasting importance to such discrete curriculum elements as facts and skills
- can transfer to other ideas, other fields and beyond into life
- "unpack" areas of the curriculum where students may struggle to gain understanding or demonstrate misunderstandings and misconceptions
- provide a conceptual foundation for studying the content area and
- are deliberately framed as declarative sentences that present major curriculum generalizations and recurrent ideas.

Defining Core Concepts:

While EUs are important for providing the overall guiding thread for a unit of study, a core concept relates to a particular lesson. Each core concept must connect to or build upon the EU but it deals more specifically with the content of the lesson at hand. The Core Concept is a declarative statement of the "big idea" of the lesson, the "what". It should also answer the "so what"? It describes what is to be learned and why it is important for the learner to learn it.

Based on materials by Dr. Lisa Grant and Dr. Andrea Weiss. Used by permission.

Match the EU to the CC!!

Enduring Understanding	Core Concept
1. For us as Jews, the Exodus is the foundational story of human transformation from slavery to freedom.	a. Bitterness may refer to external or internal influences in our lives.
2. The Seder's Haggadah reflects a range of Jewish values.	b. Slavery takes many forms, including the Jewish story in Egypt, the African American story in the United States and the current scourge of trafficking.
3. Jewish symbols can carry a variety of meanings that are understood differently on a personal level in the course of a lifetime.	c. The Cup of Elijah stands for experiences of the Jewish People that have not yet happened.
4. The Haggadah reflects on the Jewish experience of past, present and future.	d. 'Feeding the hungry' is an appropriate Jewish response to the Seder and to God's Commandments.

SESSION II HANDOUT RESOURCE WORKSHEET PLANNING PASSOVER LESSON

Enduring Understandings:

For us as Jews, the Exodus is the foundational story of human transformation from slavery to freedom.

The Seder's Haggadah reflects a range of Jewish values.

Jewish symbols can carry a variety of meanings that are understood differently on a personal level in the course of a lifetime.

The Haggadah reflects on the Jewish experience of past, present and future.

Others:

Essential Questions:

What does it really mean to be enslaved?

What are the limits of my freedom?

When is liberty as important as freedom?

How am I a reflection of God's image?

What responsibilities does Judaism demand of me in caring for the world and its people.

Others:

Core Concept

Our ancestors became slaves in Egypt and God helped Moses gain their freedom.

Slavery takes many forms, including the Jewish story in Egypt, the African American story in the United States and the current scourge of trafficking.

The Cup of Elijah stands for future experiences of the Jewish People.

Bitterness may refer to external or internal influences in our lives.

Freedom and liberty are two different things.

Jews cherish the unique freedom afforded by American law.

Slavery is experienced by each of us in the form of habits of body, mind and spirit that we struggle to escape.

'Feeding the hungry' is an appropriate Jewish response to the Seder and to God's commandments.

Others:

Learning Activities:

Read/illustrate/act out the story of Moses.

Arrange individual sentences of the Exodus story into a coherent story.

Look at the words of Negro spirituals and identify concepts taken from the Exodus story.

Look up 'freedom' and 'liberty.' Debate the merits and deficits of each.

Investigate Jews who have worked to defend the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Reflect on ways that you enslave yourself.

Research hunger in our community and investigate responses to it by our community.

Others:

SESSION II HANDOUT

Lesson **Topic:** -----Grade **level:** -----

Length of lesson: — — — — —

Stage 1 – Desired Results	
Enduring Understanding:	
Understanding (s)/goals Students will understand:	Essential Question(s):
Student objectives (outcomes): Students will be able to:	
Materials:	
Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
Performance Task(s): Students will do this during the lesson:	Other Evidence:
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	
Learning Activities:	

SESSION II HANDOUT
REFLECTION ON SESSION II

Consider some or all of these questions as they impact your own teaching practice:

What did you think of the think-pair-share approach we used at the beginning? In what ways did it facilitate our session? Can you think of a place to use it in your classroom with students?

How does this lesson planning process differ from what you usually do? What makes it better or worse? More difficult or easier? What impact would you anticipate in your classroom? What was it like sharing the process with a partner?

In considering using this process in the future, what would make it difficult? Where do you anticipate needing further help?

Lesson: Making Learning Bloom**Topic: 6 Levels of Learning; 6 Kinds of Questions****Length of lesson: 90 minutes****Stage 1 – Desired Results****Core Concept:**

The same material can be taught on many different levels, depending on the capacity of the learners. Asking the right questions directs the teacher's instructional efforts and helps improve learning for all students. **It** allows for diverse learners in the same class to reach for their highest potential.

Understanding (s)/goals

Teachers will:

- Appreciate the importance of good questions as part of the lesson planning process
- Recognize that different learners are capable of knowledge acquisition and thought at different levels.

Essential Question(s):

- What kinds of questions make students think?
- What kinds of questions help create meaningful discussions?
- How do questions make the learning significant?

Objectives (outcomes):

Teachers will be able to:

- Modify the lesson plans they have begun for Pesach, corresponding to Bloom's lower and higher level thinking
- Imagine and plan for learners who will require lower level or higher level questions
- Create questions at different levels to offer to different kinds of learners
- Identify questions that appeal to themselves and consider whether those questions will appeal to other learners

Materials:

Handouts:

- Session III Text Study sheet with Text and questions to consider
- handout
- Levels of Questions=Levels of Thinking
- Blooming Flower (on ledger paper)
- Reflection on Session III questions

Easel with poster paper or chalkboard

Paper, pens

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence	
<p>Performance Task(s):</p> <p>Teachers will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Label questions provided according to their place in Bloom's Taxonomy • Create new questions at each level of Bloom's Taxonomy • Choose or write questions to incorporate into their lesson plan for Pesach 	<p>Other Evidence:</p> <p>(Based in rubric of Doing, Knowing, Believing, Learning, Belonging)</p> <p>D – Tweak EUs and CCs in lesson plan</p> <p>K – Label questions raised during the session</p> <p>V – Express concern for range of learners in the classroom</p> <p>B – share personal news</p> <p>Observable interest and participation in discussion.</p>
Stage 3 – Learning Plan	
<p>Learning Activities:</p> <p>Check-In: News and Doings members want to share with the faculty group.</p> <p>Introduction: Principal introduces the topic of Bloom's Taxonomy as a way to consider different levels, capacities and kinds of learners in the classroom. (May include the classic, "Why do Jews always answer a question with a question?" "Do we?" Or Sam Levenson's claim that every day after school his mother asked, "Did you ask any good questions today?")</p> <p>Anchor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect some good questions. Invite teachers to share questions they have been asked by learners or by their own children that they thought were particularly good questions. Other possibilities: good questions they have posed, good questions asked of them in coursework, etc. Also invite questions they have about teaching. • Record questions on chalkboard or poster paper. <p>Text Study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pirkei Avot 4:15 Four Different Learners. Have teachers read text and discuss questions in chevruta pairs. Come together to discuss connection between text and Bloom's taxonomy. Talk about application in the classroom. Also, talk about which kinds of questions appeal to them personally. Point out that different people think differently! Lessons also need to take that into account. <p>Add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Benjamin Bloom, professor of Education in 1950's, who created a taxonomy that suggests levels of questions that correspond to levels of thinking. • Using the 'Lower Level Questions/Higher Level Questions' Handout show graduated questions from Knowledge to Evaluation. • Return to questions recorded at beginning of session; identify to which level each corresponds. • Distribute handout 'Levels of Questions=Levels of Thinking.' Teachers take 5 minutes to complete page 1 with a partner. Come together to compare answers. (Some answers may appear to fall into two categories and the group may or may not reach consensus on where they belong.) 	

- Handout ledger paper with flower in the center to each participant. Have each teacher choose one of the six areas – the classification that they find easiest – to write a new question. Participants pass the paper to the right two places; this person adds two more questions in the area (of the remaining five) that she thinks is most important. Participants pass the paper two more places to the right; this person adds two more questions in the most difficult area (of the remaining four). Pass the paper back three people to the left; record two questions (in one of the remaining three areas) that are not appropriate to students at the level of yours. Return the paper to the original person. Discuss ease and difficulty of creating new questions. Assess where help is still needed.

Apply:

- Teachers return to lesson plans they are working on to review levels of thinking they have been aiming at and reconsider questions they intend to ask in the lesson. Incorporate questions from the flower worksheet as appropriate. Work in pairs or groups of three to revise each lesson.

Lesson Debrief

Principal reviews tools for 'Friendly Feedback,' 'Lesson Debrief' and examining the lesson plan as a method of improving instruction.

- Use Lesson Debrief Protocol, including identifying the kinds of questions and levels of thinking used during the session
- Use Friendly Feedback Protocol

Away:

- Revise lesson plans online if not yet done.
- Teachers write reflection on the lesson planning process so far using handout 'Reflection on Session II' to guide their thinking.

Housekeeping:

- Planning for next sessions. Discussion of where the group will go from here. Start to distribute responsibilities for teachers

SESSION III HANDOUT

TEXT STUDY

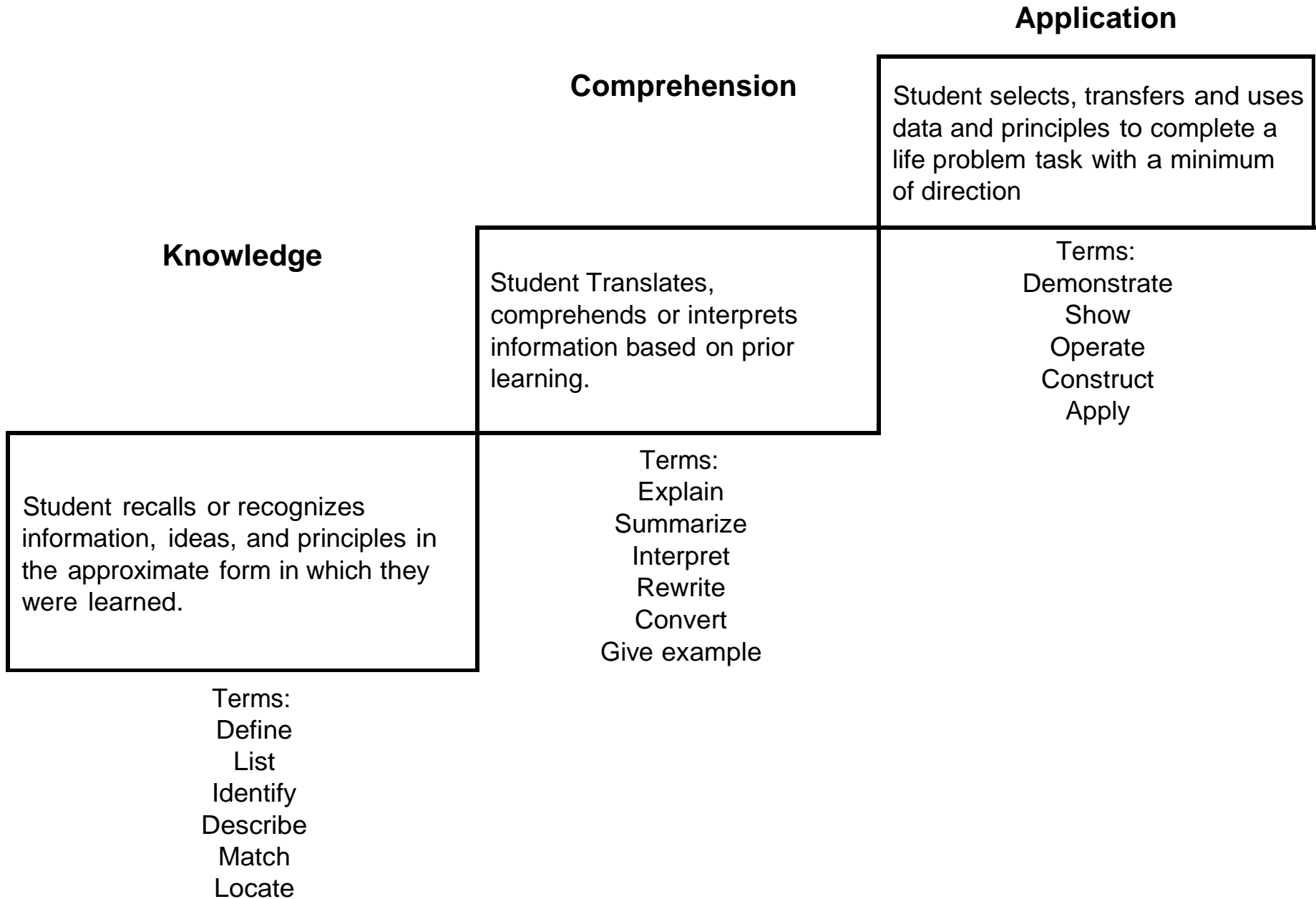
Pirkei Avot 4:15 Four Different Learners

טו ארבע מדות ביושבים לפני חכמים. ספוג, ומשפך, משמרת, ונפה. ספוג, שהוא סופג את הכל.
משפך, שמכניס בזו. משמרת, שמוציאה את היין וקולטת את ה-שְמרים. ונפה,
שמוציאה את הקמח וקולטת את הסלת.

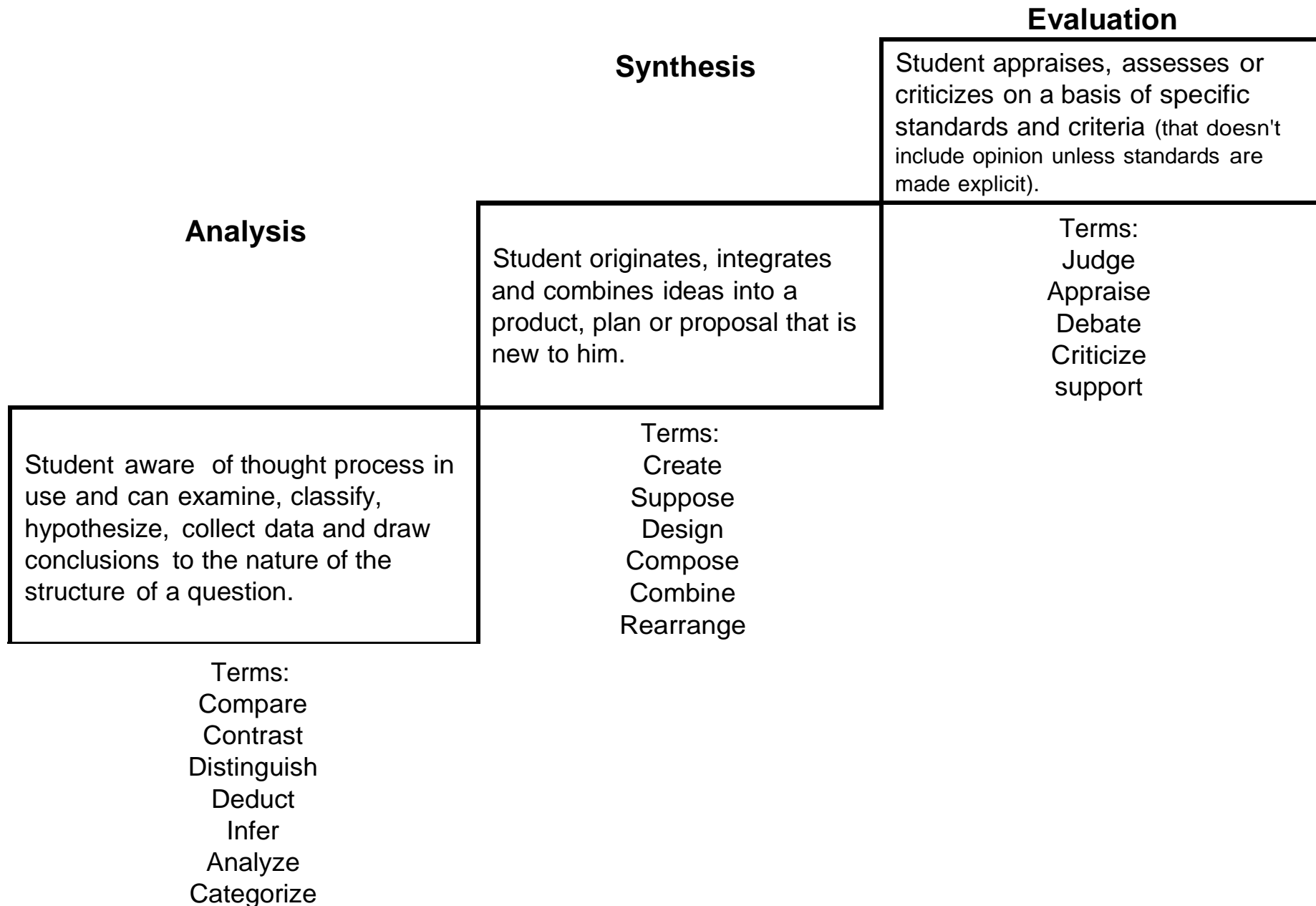
There are four types among those who sit before the sages: the sponge, the funnel, the strainer and the sieve. The sponge absorbs all. The funnel takes in at one end and lets it out the other. The strainer rejects the wine and retains the sediment. The sieve rejects the coarse flour and retains the fine flour.

1. What does the text say? About whom does the text speak?
2. What does the text say?
3. Which are you?
4. Have you had learners like any of these? Describe an incident that fits one of these descriptions.
5. Is there a fifth learner you would add?

Lower Level Questions



Higher level Questions



SESSION IIIHANDOUT

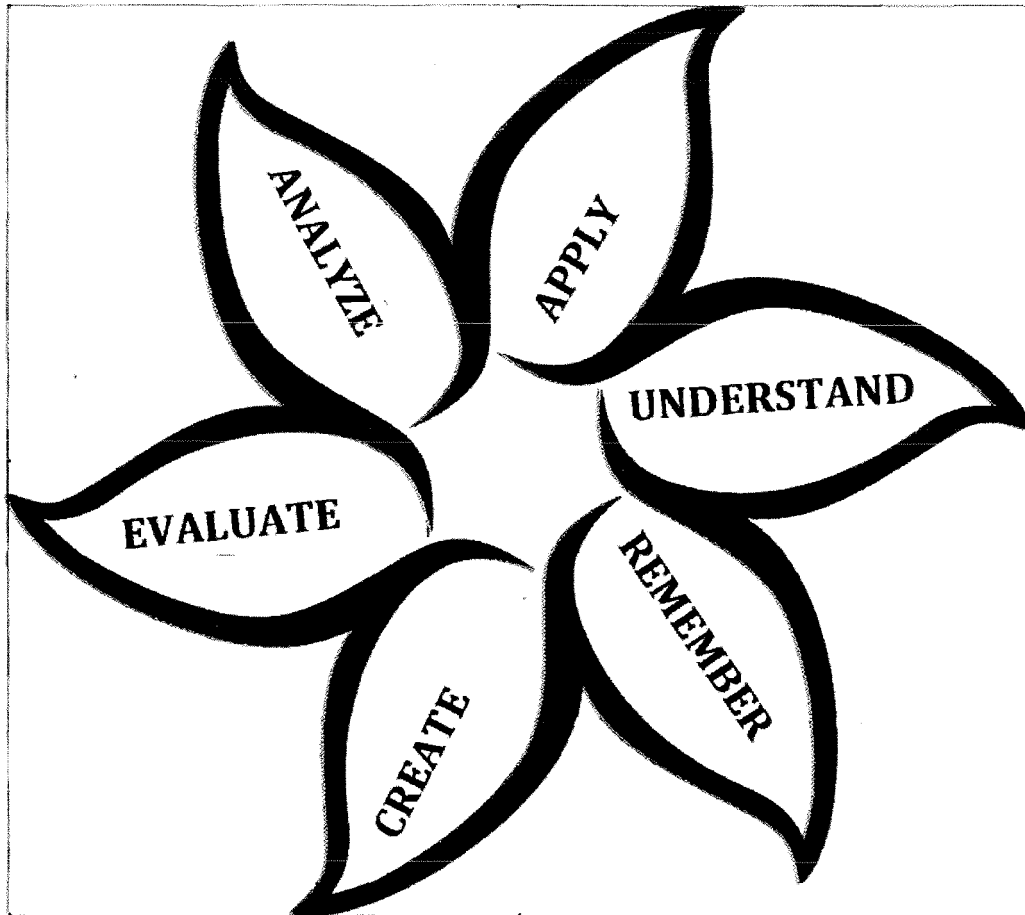
LEVELS OF QUESTIONS=LEVELS OF THINKING

For each item, identify which level of Bloom's taxonomy is being applied and what level of thinking it requires of the learner.

QUESTION (based on Pesach)	BLOOM'S TAXONOMY (Remember, Comprehend, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, Create)	LEVELS OF THINKING (lower or higher)
1. What are the items on the Seder Plate?		
2. How are the items on the Seder plate used?		
3. What does the shankbone represent?		
4. Do you believe that we should still have a shankbone on the Seder plate in 2014?		
5. What would you like to put in your charoset: make up a new recipe. Explain the meaning behind your choice of ingredients.		
6. Give the egg a new meaning. Write a paragraph to add to your Seder about the new meaning of the egg.		
7. Which food on the Seder plate is used first?		
8. Using your own words, explain what the maror means and why we used it at the Seder?		
9. Describe the scene as the Israelites get to the Red Sea as you imagine it might have been.		
10. What position would you have taken if you had arrived at the Red Sea with the Israelites?		
11. Can you think of another holiday that has a 'villain' like Pharaoh? Compare and contrast the two.		
12. What do you think would have happened if Moses had failed?		

SESSION VI HANDOUT

From: http://ochi.info/XOCH/II/EOLX/X/xexochi_decorative_flower_1-929px.png



Note to user: Enlarge image on ledger paper (11" X 17") and provide one copy to each participant.

SESSION IIIHANDOUT
REFLECTION ON SESSION III

Consider some or all of these questions as they impact your own teaching practice:

How are you finding this lesson plan revision process?

What parts of Session III appealed to you most? Share why you think that is.

What part of the session was most helpful?

Was it helpful to have questions by others on your flower worksheet?

Identify areas you feel the need for more input to improve your lesson plan.

Appendix A

A Crash Course in Understanding by Design

[Note: From the unpublished Capstone Project of Daniel Kirzane. Used with permission.]

This curriculum uses the approach to education known as "understanding by design" (UBD), which is described in detail in Grant Wiggins' and Jay McTighe's book by the same name.² While I highly recommended reading Wiggins' and McTighe's clear and practical descriptions firsthand, I will also outline some key fundamentals of UBD that will be helpful in executing this curriculum. Indeed, these concepts may prove useful in all instruction as the principles apply across disciplines and can be employed in a variety of settings.

Understanding

The most essential component of UBD is "understanding." According to Wiggins and McTighe, "An understanding is a mental construct, an abstraction made by the human mind to make sense of many distinct pieces of knowledge" (37).³ The distinguishing features of understanding are:

1. An understanding is an important inference, drawn from the experience of experts, stated as a specific and useful generalization.
2. An understanding refers to transferable, big ideas having enduring value beyond a specific topic.
3. An understanding involves abstract, counterintuitive, and easily misunderstood ideas.
4. An understanding is best acquired by "uncovering" (i.e., it must be developed inductively, co-constructed by learners) and "doing" the subject (i.e., using the ideas in realistic settings and with real-world problems).
5. An understanding summarizes important strategic principles in skill areas (128-129).

²Wiggins, Grant P., and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.

³All citations taken from *ibid*.

It is essential to distinguish understanding from *knowledge*, which involves recall of specific facts or mastery of a particular skill. For example, one may easily *know* how to start a car without *understanding* how cars start. Additionally, one may *know* that the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides without *understanding* the significance, application, or transferability of the Pythagorean Theorem. In our contexts, a student may *know* that there are five books in the Torah without an *understanding* of the meaning of Torah in Jews' lives, or a student may *know* that בִּינָה is pronounced *binah* without *understanding* the depth and richness of this concept in Jewish thought. Ultimately, our goal as educators should be to nourish understanding rather than knowledge because understanding leads students on paths of continued discovery of ever-richer meaning while knowledge lies still in the mind.

Enduring Understandings

In particular, we guide our students toward *enduring understandings*.⁴ *Enduring understandings* (EUs) are specific inferences, based on big ideas, that have lasting value beyond the classroom. They use discrete facts or skills to focus on large concepts, principles, or processes. They derive from and enable transfer: They are applicable to new situations within or beyond the subject. Ideal EUs

1. are at the heart of a discipline or area of study.
2. are lifelong; they can be explored by people of any age.
3. are abstract and should be engaged and grappled with.
4. are counterintuitive, easily misunderstood ideas.
5. are big ideas embedded in facts, skills, and activities.
6. should "make the angels sing."
7. are not facts.

⁴ The following is drawn from *ibid.* 128-130 and derived from syntheses provided by Dr. Lisa Grant and Nechama Moskowitz.

Examples of EUs in our context include:

- Prayer broadens our awareness of God's presence, nourishing our beliefs in God, leading to love of God's people.
- Reform Judaism calls for each person to live an ethical life based on Torah, a connection to community, and a partnership with God.
- A Jewish person is like a reed: alone, one can be easily broken, but a group together stands strong against the wind.

Any understanding may be considered an *enduring understanding* in the appropriate context; this makes selection of good EUs for our lessons exceptionally difficult. However, strong EUs are critical to powerful learning in UBD, so spending time to craft them carefully is well worth the effort. The EUs in this curriculum are designed to focus adult and child learners on co-constructing a rich and joyous Jewish family.

Essential Questions

While we aim to cultivate understanding in our learners, "essential questions" (EQs) are those deep and recurring questions to which we return over and over again in our lives. These questions have no single answer (even a complex one), and they should resonate deeply-though differently-with every learner. Thus, questions such as "What does the *maror* on the seder plate symbolize?" or even "How does Judaism approach the concept of bitterness?" are *not* EQs since they have clear answers. Rather, an *essential* question would be, "How does Jewish wisdom help me understand bitterness?" A six-year-old and a sixty-year-old will both be able to explore this question, and their learning will be enriched by good teaching.

Wiggins and McTighe suggest that "a question is essential if it is meant to

1. Cause genuine and relevant inquiry into the big ideas and core content.
2. Provoke deep thought, lively discussion, sustained inquiry, and new understandings as well as more questions.

3. Require students to consider alternatives, weigh evidence, support their ideas, and justify their answers.
4. Stimulate vital, ongoing rethinking of big ideas, assumptions, prior lessons.
5. Spark meaningful connections with prior learning and personal experiences.
6. Naturally recur, creating opportunities for transfer to other situations and subjects" (110).

In *sum*, the learning of every lesson should equip students to address essential questions, which accompany and supplement the *enduring understandings* of the curriculum.

Backward Design

Both EUs and EQs are part of *backward design*, which is an approach to education planning that starts with the goals of education and finishes with the activities. Often, teachers are attracted to what they consider to be "engaging activities," choosing to use them in their classes and hoping that students will learn from them. Teachers collect enough engaging activities to fill up their class period and that, they *say*, is a lesson. *So*, such teachers may say to themselves, "I just read about a *great* game online that I could easily adapt for Purim. I'll start with that *game*, and since I know my students love to *draw*, then I'll have them draw pictures-of Purim symbols, of course. We'll read a story (I'll find one later) and then have a short discussion about *it*-then sing some songs and we're done!" While this lesson may be *fun*, there's no guarantee that it will actually *teach* anything-and even if students do absorb meaningful content, the teacher has not committed to discovering whether and how his or her students understand.

In contrast to this model, backward design starts with the ultimate goal: understanding. One lists the enduring understandings first and then makes sure that *every activity* is in service of the enduring understanding. As Wiggins and McTighe put it: "Our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived

from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable" (14). Did you find a great game online? Fabulous-but use it in your classroom *only* if it is in service of the enduring understanding. Instead of thinking, "How will I fill up 45 minutes with fun, engaging activities this week?" think, "How will I guide my students to understand this core concept?" By starting with the goals and having the entire lesson plan flow from that wellspring, the lesson remains more focused on the true purposes of education: to help students discover meaning in the world and to cultivate wise and eager life-long learners equipped to continue their journey of discovery.

Evidence of understanding

A final component of Understanding by Design that's important to remember for this curriculum is that of *evidence of understanding*. UBD encourages us to check for our students' understanding rather than to assume (or simply hope) that they understand as a result of our teaching. The best evidence comes in the form of *authentic assessments*, which are real-life activities that could only be accomplished if the producer has real understanding. In our context, then, students might make a recommendation (in person) to their synagogue's social action committee at the end of their *tzedek* unit. Or students might write letters to Israeli penpals to tell them about their Passover experiences during their "symbolic food" unit. In this curriculum, for example, families make a visit to a hospital or nursing home during their unit on *bikkurcholim*. The key here is that first, the educational experience cultivates an understanding (which, by its nature, has transfer to the "real world") and then students create a product (physical or abstract) that serves as *evidence* of their understanding.

While designing assessment activities that themselves are educational and engaging can be exceedingly difficult, it's also exceptionally important. Without assessing our students' understanding, we have no way of knowing whether we're succeeding with our teaching. And since we are committed not to *covering content* but to *cultivating understanding*, we must always seek to correct our teaching if it's not leading anywhere. It may be frustrating to conclude collecting evidence of understanding and to realize that our students just *didn't get it*— but rather than giving up and moving on because we have more *stuff to cover*, we must reconsider our teaching such that we're able to try again to produce real understanding. It's not about getting through material, in the end, and collecting evidence of understanding serves as a corrective to our impulse to push through the year without looking back, reminding us to stay on course in the education of our learners.

Conclusion

These few pages serve, as promised, only as a "crash course" in Understanding by Design, but I hope that they provide some helpful guidance for this curriculum as well as future teaching. As these are only my own reflections on understanding, and since they are quite brief, I recommend reading the original *Understanding by Design* for a more comprehensive treatment of these important concepts. In the meantime, this curriculum may serve as a framework for using backward design in your classroom.

As you set out on this journey of meaningful education, remember that the work you do is holy. Recall as you teach the words of Proverbs: *How much better to acquire wisdom than gold; preferable to silver is acquiring understanding* (16:16).

AppendixB

FRIENDLY FEEDBACK PROTOCOL

In this protocol, learners are invited to reflect on the teaching that has just taken place, offering the teacher immediate and supportive feedback.

At the conclusion of a piece of teaching, learners are invited to share two comments. These are communicated with the teacher in writing or, ideally, through an immediate quick email message. The two comments are invited in the following format:

1. One thing I liked was _____
2. One thing I had a question about (or one thing I wondered about) was

Thereafter, the teacher is invited to reflect on the feedback to identify new learning and areas for growth. This reflection takes place at some remove from the initial teaching experience, a day or two later.

Thanks to Drs. Lisa Grant and Andrea Weiss for introducing me to this protocol concept.

Appendix C DEBRIEFING

THE LESSON

Following a piece of teaching conducted by the principal (or a peer colleague), teachers are invited to examine the learning process of which they have just been a part, identifying the steps in the process and the rationale behind them. Examining their own learning experience in this way enables them to reflect on how they can construct effective learning experiences in their own teaching process.

1. Ask teachers to review the events that took place as they participated. A list of learning activities can be generated through this process. The principal guides teachers to make ensure that all of the steps are listed and sequenced properly.
2. This is followed by the question, "Can you identify the intended goal or objective for each step?" "What do you think are my guiding questions in designing the lesson?" With encouragement, this can yield a set of goals and objectives or learning outcomes similar to those the principal actually used.
3. Finally, the question should be posed, "Are these the goals you would have chosen?" Encourage teachers to look beyond the goals to some larger aim that should point to the principal's Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions.
4. Finally, the principal shares the lesson plan and reviews the process by which she arrived at this particular lesson with these specific activities, pointing to the Backward Design approach.
5. Teachers are asked to reflect (the Friendly Feedback Protocol may be used here) on whether the learning was effective in terms of the principal's intent.

Teachers are reminded of this process when they work on their own lesson plans.

AppendixD

CREATING TEXT STUDY FOR TEACHERS

1. Choose a text that bears on the topic under consideration.
2. Produce the text in both Hebrew and English.
3. Create questions to guide the learners.
 - a. The first question asks, "What does the text say?" This is the simplest level, allowing learners to explore the text at face value and ask clarifying questions.
 - b. Several questions follow, asking learners to explore the meaning, Jewish ideas, values, etc., and relate the text to the topic at hand.
 - c. The final question asks learners to reflect and/or apply the learning to their life, their teaching, their students. This question may also ask learners how they might use the text in their own work.

If learners are unfamiliar with Text Study or hevruta-style learning, the first text(s) study should be planned by the facilitator and be discussed by the group as a whole. Gradually, as learners become more facile, small group or paired study may be encouraged. Also, learners may be charged with leading the discussion and, eventually, with finding the text and fashioning their own questions.

Annotated Bibliography

- Aron, Isa. "Toward the Professionalization of Jewish Teaching." Report to Commission on Jewish Education in North America. (1990). PDF. Aron works toward a definition of professionalization in teaching, focusing on legitimacy, autonomy and commitment. She goes on to compare Jewish teaching settings with those of the public schools raising the question of whether the balance of the three elements might need to be inclined more toward commitment, especially in the supplementary school. Finally, she suggests creating a differentiated staffing arrangement along a range from more avocational teachers to experienced mentor teachers.
- "Realism as the Key to Excellence in Congregation Education." *Agenda: Jewish Education*. 17 (2004): 9-12. PDF. In this brief article, Aron elaborates on her suggestion that congregational schools think of staffing in a pyramid form with avocational teachers at the bottom, the senior educator at the top and a middle level of trainers who train either the teachers or the educator. This design, along with thoughtful training for teachers could address the so-called crisis in personnel and the lack of professional teachers.
- Clifton Heather and Kasloff, Peggy. "Building a Professional Learning Community (PLC): A Primer". *Journal of Jewish Educational Leadership* 6:1 (Fall 2007). In this article aimed at day school educators, the authors argue for the superiority of the PLC in improving instruction through collaboration and reflection. They outline key elements for designing a PLC that results in classroom application and provide methods of coaching. Finally, they offer a few suggestions for working with inevitable obstacles.
- Dorph, Gail Zaiman. "What Do Teachers Need to Know to Teach Torah?" *Essays in Education and Judaism in Honor of Joseph S. Lukinsky*, ed. Burton Cohen 97-113. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2002. Dorph proposes that professional development around teaching Torah should include exploration of scholarly thinking, teacher beliefs, possible purposes for teaching Torah, anticipating learners' anticipated interest in and difficulty with the text, strategies for teaching, and familiarity with available curricular materials.
- Dorph, Gail Zaiman and Holtz, Barry W. "Professional Development for Teachers: Why Doesn't the Model Change?" *Journal of Jewish Education* (August 2006). This article examines an earlier study of professional development as provided by central agencies or synagogues in five cities. The authors assert that, generally, directors are not trained to provide teacher development, underestimate what is needed and are unfamiliar with how to deliver it. The specific need they identify for teacher development is guidance in delivery of instruction that includes specific content. The authors point to obstacles to change in the form of the current infrastructure of teaching arrangements in the Jewish community.

- Gow, Peter. "What Do Teachers Want?" *HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal* (2008): 6-9. PDF. http://www.ravsak.org/uploads/files/hayidion/HaYidion_0811.pdf. Gow believes that the shortage of teachers can be addressed internally by the way schools work with the teachers they have. He focuses on the importance of 5 areas in personnel management, including: supporting new teachers effectively; offering meaningful development opportunities that build teachers as leaders; helping teachers keep their work in tune with school culture and expectations; applying transparent feedback and evaluation; and recognizing teachers' work through salary and other mechanisms.
- Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA). (2008). *Educators in Jewish Schools Study (EJSS)*. PDF. In 2006, JESNA conducted a study of teachers in Jewish schools throughout the country. About 50% of all schools responded to survey questions about why teachers come into Jewish teaching, who makes up the faculty, their satisfaction in the field, and what factors influence whether they remain in the field. The report concludes with suggestions for addressing the teacher shortage, recruiting teachers, retaining those in the field, and improving professional development opportunities for teachers in day schools and complementary schools along separate tracks.
- Lee, Sara S. Inservice Education: A Priority for All Seasons. *The Pedagogic Reporter* 35:2 (1984): 21-23. PDF. In this now classic article of nearly 30 years ago, Sara S. Lee calls for changes in 'inservice' education for teachers in Jewish schools. She calls for education with the learner at the center, approaching teachers as adult learners with unique needs for learning, practicing and feedback to be effected in the context of the school as a developing organization. While acknowledging the challenges of part-time educators, the author suggests possible approaches to be tried to promote personal and professional growth among faculty.
- Stodolsky, Susan S., Dorph, Gail Zaiman and Nemser, Sharon Feiman (2006) "Professional Culture and Professional Development in Jewish Schools: Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences", *Journal of Jewish Education* 72 (2), 91-108. The authors conducted a study of professional development and culture in a cross-section of 10 Jewish schools. They focus on the success of sustained, long-term, collegial interactions in improving instruction. This includes opportunities for teachers to observe each other and to learn how to participate in constructive yet critical conversations together. They conclude that principals need to create opportunities and methods for teachers to participate in state-of-the-art development experiences.

Additional Sources

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- Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone Edition, 1997. Print. In this classic, Dewey outlines his theory of education. He posits that the learner's past experience shapes his/her perception of new learning, giving shape to the new material. Dewey also argues that all learning can only arise from the learner's need to know. Finally, he believes that learning only occurs when the learner reflects on the experience to integrate the new with the old.
- Dorph, Gail Zaiman. "What Do Teachers Need to Know to Teach Torah?" in *Essays in Education and Judaism in Honor of Joseph S. Lukinsky*, ed. Burton Cohen. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2002), 97-113.
- Krasner, Jonathan. *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011. Print. In this history of Jewish Education in America, Krasner focuses on the work of pioneer visionary Samson Benderly and of his proteges who created and peopled the central education agencies around the country. Their visions of what Jewish education should be and how communities can work to that end continue to influence the goals and structures of Jewish education in the American Jewish community.
- The Jewish Education Project: LOMED Wiki (lamed.wikispaces.com)*. This curriculum was written with guidance from the LOMED initiative, which seeks to revitalize synagogue-based Jewish education through the Jewish Education Project of New York. Read this website for a fuller understanding of the LOMED ideas, particularly the "noticing targets" as they are outlined there.

